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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0292
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 8305
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 4544
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 4032
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 1214
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1907
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1883
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN PRIORITY 0006
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0064
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 001187

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2026
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: "MERCENARIES" IN KENYA TURN TABLES ON THEIR
ACCUSERS

REF: A. (A) NAIROBI 988

[1](#)B. (B) NAIROBI 1114

[1](#)C. (C) NAIROBI 1023

Classified By: A/DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Stepping out of the shadows, Kenya's "foreign mercenaries" stun Kenya with claims the opposition, not the government, tried to hire them to bankroll regime change. Following the foreigners' March 13 staged press conference, ostensibly to clear their names, the intensity of the accusations has only grown, with calls for arrests of the very opposition leaders who days ago were on the offensive. While it is early yet to sift truth from sensation, it is clear that these men are connected to prominent Kenyans and are fuel for the increasingly hostile and messy political debate in Kenya. END SUMMARY.

Hired Thugs or Just Fabulously Wealthy Businessmen?

[1](#)2. (C) After a week of cat-and-mouse with the media and opposition, alleged mercenaries are out of hiding and turning the tables on their Kenyan accusers. On March 13, two men, identified in the media as foreign mercenaries, staged a press conference to "clear their names." Dressed to the hilt in "Soprano-esque" suits and dripping with ostentatious gold accessories, one even sporting gold-rimmed rose-colored glasses for the event, they denied claims that they are mercenaries hired by the Kenyan government. They claim to have just returned to Kenya after a few days in Dubai. The men's coming-out followed opposition ODM leader MP Raila Odinga's repeated accusations that the government hired foreigners to carry out the March 2 raid on the Standard Media Group and to assassinate leading opposition figures (ref A). During their press event held in a limited-access airport "government VIP lounge," the men claimed they are Armenians and merely wealthy businessmen. They added, "if we were mercenaries, Kenya could not afford us." They claimed to have had failed business dealings with Odinga and met with Kalonzo Musyoka and Odinga who sought USD 41,600,000 to support the "No" referendum campaign as a way to bring down the Kibaki government. They also announced that they had loaned Odinga approximately USD1.5 million in cash.

13. BIONOTE: Photocopies of passports believed to belong to the two foreigners reveal that they are: Margaryan, Artur, DOB: 15 Jan 73, passport number AB0322223, issued 27 Jan 97; and Sargsyan, Artur, DOB: 14 May 70, passport number AF0599780, issued 1 Mar 03. END BIONOTE.

14. (C) At their own press conference the next day, both Odinga and Musyoka deny the claims. ODM accused the foreigners of laundering drug trafficking proceeds and challenged President Kibaki to come clean on the presence of the Armenians in Kenya. State House responded with a Presidential Press Service statement warning Odinga against tarnishing the Office of the President with baseless "propaganda." One of the mercenaries claimed to have videotaped his passing money to Odinga in a Dubai hotel several months ago. Pro-government members of parliament, led by Environment Minister Kivutha Kibwana, called March 14 for the arrest of Odinga and Musyoka on charges of treason. (NOTE: Post has reason to believe that the threat to arrest Odinga may indeed be imminent. Given the tribal undertones and the clear sense that this is no longer "politics as usual," Post has urged State House not to rashly move to arrest Odinga or other opposition leaders. Presidential Policy Adviser Stanley Murage told A/DCM March 15 that the police would take statements from the Armenian accusers this week before making any arrests. END NOTE.)

15. (C) Numerous irregularities in the Armenians' stories create a strong suspicion that the government may be puppeteering the charade to discredit Odinga and other opposition leaders. (Ref B.) The foreigners claim they are Armenians, even nephews of the Armenian Prime Minister. However, the Kenyan Immigration Minister, John Konchella, says that they are Czech nationals. Even their very arrival at the airport is in dispute. They claim to have just

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arrived from Dubai on a Kenya Airways flight. However, immigration officials stated they arrived on a charter flight. Several others, including Odinga, insist the pair arrived via a government vehicle to the airport hours before the Dubai flight landed. Post has various pieces of evidence suggesting that the men are associated with either State House or one of the "first families" and Kamlesh Pattni, the man behind the Goldenberg scandal.

Demonstrations: Not Just for the Opposition

16. (C) Proving the government can also draw a crowd (ref C), a handful of pro-Kibaki officials organized a march through downtown Nairobi March 10. The MPs present professed their loyalty to President Kibaki. "Just like ants, termites, and bees do not allow the queen to be attacked, we will also protect the President." The event also included a slew of accusations against ODM leader Raila Odinga, with a foreign twist - Raila sold part of his business interests to Russian arms dealers, and "is the one with links in Russia, having gone to college there." (NOTE: In fact, Odinga went to college in East Germany. END NOTE.) The opposition was not the only target. According to media reports, Assistant Gender and Sports Minister Maina Kamanda warned journalists against writing reports that discredit the government. Media persons, he said, "would not be spared in the event of chaos," suggesting they would be held accountable should their work incite unrest. Attempting to tone down the ethnic tenor of the rhetoric, Kibaki, speaking at a meeting of 70 MPs aligned with him, advised his colleagues to "weigh very carefully what we say," and avoid "opportunistic politics."

Comment

17. (C) Forget the fiction of LeCarre's novel "The Constant Gardener." This real-life tale of hired thugs of questionable nationality, prominent Kenyans, massive

corruption, blackmail, threats, and narcotics trafficking schemes, reads like a script Hollywood would reject as unbelievable. Unfortunately, the dueling accusations have sidetracked public attention from the seriousness of the underlying issues of corruption and democratic space. Indeed, each new revelation of wrong-doing is bound to shake the public's faith in both sides' stries and their leaderships. END COMMENT.
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